

## *The Toronto Carrying Place: Rediscovering Toronto's Most Ancient Trail* by Glenn Turner

Victoria Freeman

Volume 108, Number 1, Spring 2016

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1050619ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050619ar>

[See table of contents](#)

---

### Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

### ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

### Cite this review

Freeman, V. (2016). Review of [*The Toronto Carrying Place: Rediscovering Toronto's Most Ancient Trail* by Glenn Turner]. *Ontario History*, 108(1), 134–135. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050619ar>

## *The Toronto Carrying Place*

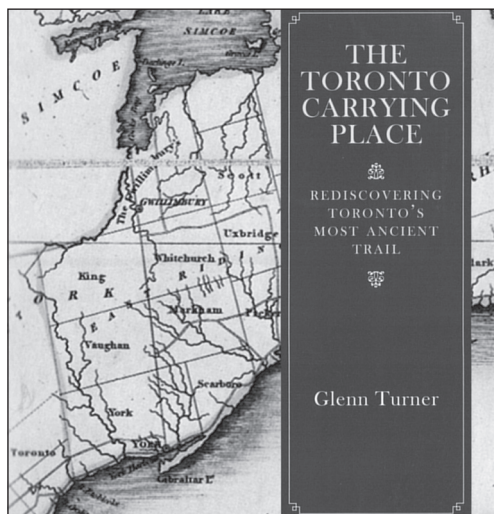
### *Rediscovering Toronto's Most Ancient Trail*

by Glenn Turner

Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2015, 192 pages.  
\$30.00 Paperback ISBN 978-1-45973-046-5.  
\$30 Digital download (PDF) ISBN 978-1-45973-047-2. \$14.99 Digital download (Epub) ISBN  
978-1-45973-048-9. (www.dundurn.com)

*The Toronto Carrying Place: Rediscovering Toronto's Most Ancient Trail* tells the story of a significant feature of Toronto's Indigenous and colonial history—the ancient portage route along the Humber River from Lake Ontario to Lake Simcoe and Lake Huron—that shaved hundreds of miles from the long canoe trek to the upper Great Lakes. At 45km, the Toronto Carrying Place was one of the longest portage routes in North America, used for millennia by Indigenous people and then as a fur trade corridor by Europeans such as Alexander Henry and La Salle. A huge bronze globe made for Louis XIV of France in 1690 was said to have clearly depicted it. Only after John Graves Simcoe's decision to build Yonge St. in 1795 did it become redundant.

Written in the form of a chatty three-day travelogue for a general audience, *The Toronto Carrying Place* follows author Glenn Turner as he tries to trace the portage route on foot from the mouth of the Humber to its terminus at present day Holland March. This is no easy task, as the trail has been almost completely obliterated and its exact route remains unknown along much of its length. Yet through entertaining storytelling drawing on archaeological reports and written accounts of the trail by explorers and settlers, and illustrated



with historic paintings and photographs, contemporary photographs, and excellent maps (with a huge debt to Percy Robinson's *Toronto During the French Regime*), Turner does his best to fill in the gaps.

Noting that only nineteenth-century railroads made land travel as fast as water, Turner jokes about the “purgatory” of portaging, but points out that Indigenous peoples did not carry their canoes over the Carrying Place, instead leaving canoes at either end. He describes the use of the trail by seventeenth-century Haudenosaunee war parties heading north to attack the Wendats, life at the Seneca village of Taiaigon, and Simcoe's 1793 trip up the Carrying Place in considerable detail. Of necessity, however, his own journey is an extended meditation on the transformation of the landscape by European colonizers. A Petro-Canada station is the likely site of eighteenth-century Fort Toronto and the home of Toronto's first European resident, fur-trader Jean-Baptiste Rousseau. Weston Park Baptist Church was built on top of a Wendat ossuary.

Forthright in describing the injustices of local colonial history, Turner highlights the legal limbo of the botched 1787 To-

ronto Purchase, supposedly “confirmed” in 1805, noting that until June 8, 2010, when the land claim by the Mississaugas of the New Credit was settled, “most of the Greater Toronto Area had been developed illegally on land that had not been properly paid for and was still owned by the Mississauga nation” (117).

Turner is a popular writer, not a historian, but he handles contentious historical debates—such as the meaning of the word “Toronto,” whether or not the Mississaugas defeated the Haudenosaunee in the 1690s or came to a negotiated agreement with them over the north shore of Lake Ontario, and whether Etienne Brulé actually travelled the route in 1615—with dexterity. More confusing is his account of the treaties of 1701, in which he foregrounds an agreement between the English and the Mississaugas, but fails to mention the Great Peace of Montreal’s confirmation of Mississauga jurisdiction over the area or the Nanfan Treaty, though his assertion that the Haudenosaunee had given up all rights on the north shore to the British some time earlier is perhaps a misinterpretation of the latter agreement. There are also some outright errors, such as his assertion that the Senecas built ossuaries, or that the archaeological site next to Emery Collegiate was a village

(it is recorded as a campsite).

Occasionally Turner’s efforts to be humorous are in poor taste and may offend First Nations readers in particular; for example, he trivializes clan identity: “I wonder how someone like me might acquire a totem animal?” (34) and sensationalizes Wendat burial practices and beliefs about the dead. Most egregious is his joking about Brulé’s sexual conduct with Indigenous women, “Samuel de Champlain was not always the most enlightened manager of French interests in Canada, but in one thing at least he was inspired: he had his young men live in First Nation communities where they could learn the language and sleep with the girls” (55). While he links this to Champlain’s advocacy of intermarriage to create “one people,” the tone of the remark seems particularly insensitive in light of the current epidemic of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and the colonial construction of Indigenous women as prostitutes.

Despite these faults, Turner is an engaging storyteller and this is an idiosyncratic, vivid, and generally informative introduction to the history of this famous trail.

Victoria Freeman  
York University

## *On Being Here to Stay* *Treaties and Aboriginal Rights in Canada*

by Michael Asch

University of Toronto Press, 2014. 232 pages. \$24.95 paper ISBN 9781442610026, \$55.00 cloth ISBN 9781442640283, \$24.95 ebook (EPUB format) ISBN 9781442669840. ([www.utppublishing.com](http://www.utppublishing.com)).

Michael Asch’s *On Being Here to Stay* addresses the question of how to achieve reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, a topic that

has taken on renewed significance since the October 2015 federal election. Asch posits that treaties, which authorized settlers to live on Indigenous lands, are a means of